

“We have the tendency to think that history remains immovable and immutable. The truth of the matter is the more you learn and comprehend, the more you make new discoveries.” *The Washington Post*, Saturday, June 13, 2009

Remembering Flag Day, 2009

by

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State House
2 p.m.
Flag Day
June 14, 2009

Welcome to the State House and to our Flag Day celebrations. We are delighted to have you all here to take part in the dedication of the new John Shaw Flag the original of which first proudly flew over this State House 226 years ago this December.

We are honored to have with us today flag bearers from Boy Scout, Cub Scout and Daisy Scout troops lead by Sea Scout Wesley Rodrigues [ck spelling] of Ship 36, Columbia.

The represent Troop 75, Columbia, Troop 129, Severna Park, Troop 783, Cape St. Claire, Pack 727, Arnold, Pack 662, Severn, Pack 119 Severn, and Troop 804 Millersville.

Please join with Wesley Rodrigues in leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.



Before we get to the celebration and dedication of the Shaw flag, we would like you all to take notice of this beautiful new podium in front of me. It was made just this year from the wood of Maryland's champion white oak, the Wye Oak. The Wye Oak was toppled during a thunderstorm five years ago this month. The Archives suggested at the time that its wood be used for at least two purposes: first, a working desk for Maryland's governors. This beautiful desk was finished in 2004 and has been in use by the governors since then. Second: we suggested this podium from which all future governors could address the major policy issues of the day as well as leading the celebration of significant events in Maryland and our Nation's history.

Both the desk and this podium were created by Maryland cabinetmakers who are here with us today and whom we would like to recognize for their excellent craftsmanship. (Jim McMartin and Jim Beggins, of Saint Michaels to stand and were recognized)

We can think of no more appropriate day than National Flag Day to first unveil this podium. Our purpose today is to pause in recognition of the importance of state and national symbols in focusing the public's attention on what those symbols stand for in uniting us as a people and reminding us of our rich heritage of building a strong and viable democracy.

When the Wye Oak was chosen as the state tree, it was not only because it was the oldest and largest surviving example of a plentiful forest of oaks that first greeted the native and European Americans that populated the Chesapeake, but also because its wood is beautiful and durable, just as the experiment in democracy and the republic on these shores is beautiful and durable.

Flags are more fragile than trees, yet they are as equally important in symbolizing the struggles of the state and the nation in pursuing and securing our rights to life, liberty, and happiness home and abroad. As they are flown in the breeze from prominent places and especially in battle, they become tattered and torn, but just as the standard bearers in past battles struggle to save them and push forward to victory, they are saved, treasured and replaced.

Next door in what will become the restored House of Delegates chamber we we have a small exhibit devoted to flags and 18th century music. In the case you will find a special Maryland flag made by Bearclaw artist of the Cherokee Nation, composed of 74,792 beads. Bearclaw and members of the Cherokee Nation are with us today. In the painstaking effort that went into Bearclaw's Maryland flag, we can sense the spirit that lifts itself up to greet the Shaw flag above us on its dedicatory day.

Flag Day was officially established by President Woodrow Wilson in 1916, who selected June 14 in honor of the Continental Congress's adoption of the flag of the United States on June 14, 1777. In 1949 President Truman signed into law an act of Congress requiring that the day be designated Flag Day in perpetuity.

There is a great deal of uncertainty about who designed and produced the first Stars and Stripes. Betsy Ross contends with Francis Hopkinson, a New Jersey Signer of the Declaration of Independence. While we do not know what that flag looked like, we do know that when the flag was adopted by Congress on June 14, 1777, it would be flown aboard John Paul Jone's ship *Ranger*, carrying the news of the defeat of the British at Saratoga in October 1777. While on its European mission, a sailor aboard the *Ranger* wrote what may have been the first ballad about the Stripes and Stars, while Paul Jones harassed the coasts of England and Ireland. The Irish might have been the first to sight our new flag as it arrived off of Cork, if it had not been in the midst of a gale. As the ballad goes:

**'Tis of a gallant Yankee ship
That flew the stripes and stars,
And the whistling wind from the west nor'west
Blew through the pitchpine spars,
With her starboard tacks aboard, my boys,
She hung upon the gale; on an autumn night
We raised the light on the old head of Kinsale. ¹**

It is likely that Jones flew a stars and stripes with a blue canton in the upper left hand corner with staggered rows of six pointed stars of Frances Hopkinson's design, but we will never know for sure. The U. S. Flag does not become standardized until after Mary Pickersgill's giant appears over Fort McHenry on September 13-14, 1814 in brave and successful defiance of the British bombardment..

In 1783 Annapolis was designated the temporary capital of the United States. Here George Washington would come to resign his Commission as Commander in Chief, and Congress would ratify the treaty ending the Revolution and placing the United States a Nation recognized among nations.

Maryland offered up the State House to Congress, and a noted Annapolis cabinetmaker, superintendent of the State House, and local undertaker, was given the order to make a U.S. Flag to fly from the then much smaller dome. All he had was the resolution of Congress calling for 13 red and white stripes and 13 stars on a blue background. Early

¹ http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?_r=2&res=9B01E2DD1130E132A2575BC1A96E9C946097D6CF

in 1983, we thought it would be a good idea to reconstruct the flag as best we could from the surviving evidence. All we had were the receipts for cloth and the knowledge that two flags were made. With the help of the Smithsonian we did our best, the flag was made and delivered in time for the opening of the exhibits in the State House:



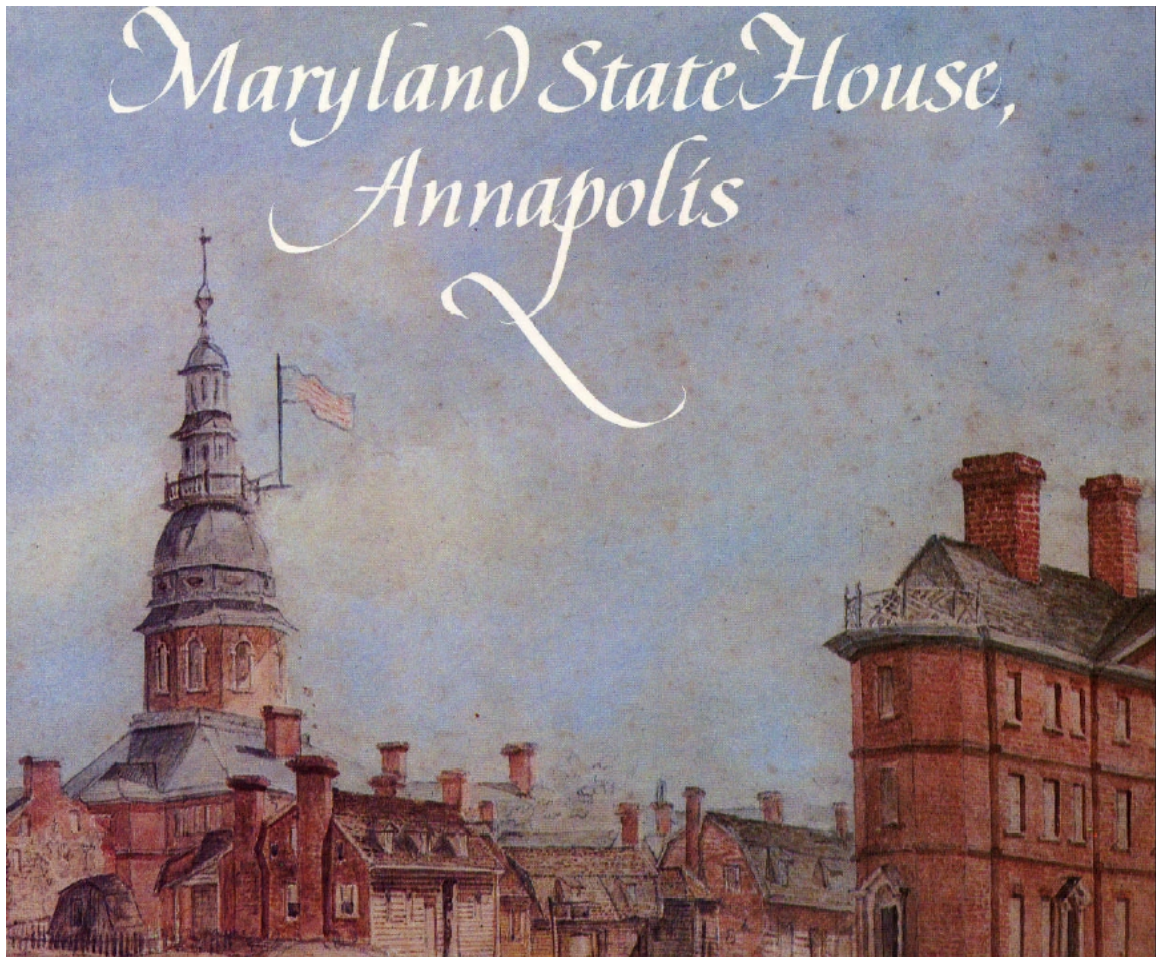


Illustration 1: Cotton Milbourne watercolor of the State House, ca. 1797. Note that John Shaw was paid a significant sum to raise the flag in 1797, possibly for the artist? See <http://mdstatehouse.net>

In the meantime, I had come across a remarkable print of the State House on display at the Hammond Harwood House here in Annapolis, that depicted a large flag flying from this dome about 1800. It looked somewhat different from the flag we had on exhibit as the Shaw Flag, especially with regard to the presentation of the stars on the blue canton. Further research and possibly changing the exhibit would have to wait, and wait we did until the development of a new master plan for exhibits for the State House and the appearance of Reverend Libby on Elaine Bachmann's doorstep. Reverend



Richardson Libby independently had become intrigued by the Hammond Harwood House print which we had on display in the State House, and on our State House brochure. He argued persuasively from his vast knowledge as a flag authority (the word is

vexilologist) that the new version of the Shaw flag that you see before you should follow the print and not the old imagined design.

We were fortunate to have the assistance of Reverend Richardson Libby, who advocated a more accurate design. With the much appreciated assistance Rick Wyatt at CRW Flags (Severna Park, Maryland) and with the additional support of the Maryland Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, we now have the “new” and faithfully accurate John Shaw flag that we dedicate today.

It is especially important that we as Marylanders pay tribute to the national flags that flew over this State House in the winter of 1783/84 and at Fort McHenry, in September of 1814, during the darkest days of the War of 1812. Those two symbols of nationhood were flown at two of the most critical junctures in our nation's history and stand for the unshakable faith we, as Americans have in the values of the Republic for which so many have given their lives and their fortunes.

On this day of national remembrance, in the company of the interested public and these fine young men representing Scout troops from throughout the state, accompanied by music contemporary to the first flying of this flag by the David and Ginger Hildebrand, it is my privilege to present the First Lady of Maryland, the honorable Katie O'Malley, who is stepping in for the Governor, to present the Governor's proclamation in honor of Flag Day and the work of Reverend Libby.

[insert text of proclamation]

Maryland has long tradition of providing apt symbols of the nation and Maryland's role in

its creation and preservation. In 1783/84, this flag flew proudly over the State House as two of the most momentous events in American history took place here.

On December 23, 1783, George Washington resigned his commission as commander-in-chief. The state now owns his personal copy of his emotional and moving remarks. With these brief remarks, delivered in a wavering but strong voice, he told the Congress that the ultimate authority of the new nation was in their hands and that this nation was not to be governed by a dictatorship of the military.

A few weeks later, under this same flag, Congress ratified the treaty ending the American Revolution and placed the United States on an equal footing among the nations of the world. Nearly 31 years later, that nationhood would be tested under another Maryland flag, created in Baltimore and flown over Fort McHenry on the night of September 13, 1814, where it remained the next morning to inspire Francis Scott Key to write the poem that would eventually become our national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

But today we honor an earlier flag, another Maryland-made flag that served to inspire the founding fathers who met under it in this building while they oversaw the business of the government in the final stages of a hard-fought war for America's independence.

Flags were not carried into battle or raised without musical accompaniment. Reveille and taps are traditional. Today we celebrate what the flag stands for with the unveiling of the reconstructed Shaw flag and the contemporary music supplied by the Hildebrands. Let us sing together in respect and joy over what this flag stands for. We have much to do

ahead of us in our quest to perfect the union and restore our economy to health, but we also have much to be thankful for and to celebrate in song.

Let us end today's program in song, thankful for the blessings we have received, and those that we will work to continue under that banner that in its present and historical form we honor today.